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**EXPERT OPINION OF
MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY
REGARDING THE COMPLAINT BY THE RA NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY DEPUTY NAZELI BAGHDASARYAN
AGAINST THE PIECE “A THOUSAND VICTIMS MORE, A
THOUSAND VICTIMS LESS”
PUBLISHED ON HRAPARAK.AM ON MARCH 12, 2021**

MEO received the appeal by the RA National Assembly Deputy Nazeli Baghdasaryan on the [piece](#) “A Thousand Victims More, A Thousand Victims Less” published on Hraparak.am on March 12, 2021 (no author is mentioned on the website).

According to the author of the complaint, the headline of the piece does not reflect the point she had made, but it was disseminated with her photo, thus targeting her.

Thus, the applicant expects MEO to carry out actions stipulated by its regulations.

A. FACTS

1. On March 12, 2021, Hraparak.am published an article entitled "A Thousand Victims More, A Thousand Victims Less", posting under the headline Nazeli Baghdasaryan's photo, and referring to the RA NA “My Step” faction Deputy Nazeli Baghdasaryan’s statement that the tense domestic political situation hinders the return of the Armenian captives held in Azerbaijan.
2. On March 12, 2021, MEO received Nazeli Baghdasaryan’s appeal, in which she noted that the headline of the piece in no way reflected the point she had made, but it was disseminated with her photo, thus targeting her. The applicant also informed that after a clarifying talk with the website editor, a picture of the Deputy Prime Minister was added to the piece, "but that did not change the essence of the matter."
3. It can be understood from the piece that the author of the article has also

had a conversation with the Deputy, during which Nazeli Baghdasaryan has stated that by that expression she meant the tense internal political situation in general. After this indirect quote, the author of the article concludes, "of course, it is unlikely that the pro-government deputy would consider their very government and the Prime Minister as number one responsible for that tension".

4. On March 24, 2021, Media Ethics Observatory wrote a letter to Armineh Ohanyan, Editor-in-Chief of Hraparak.am, requesting the latter's comments on the complaint, as well as additional information, if any. The Editor-in-Chief presented her approach that MEO does not have the authority to review the appeals related to the daily and suggested that the complainant go to court or appeal directly to them. However, MEO, which enjoys the trust of more than 60 media and views the establishment of the principles of professional ethics in the Armenian media field as its mission, believes that basing itself on the principle of freedom of expression it has full authority to present to the public its expert position on various publications based on the citizens' proper appeals/complaints.

5. On March 24-31, 2021, MEO held online discussions on the complaint.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

I. RA Civil Code

Article 1087.1. The procedure and terms of compensation for damage caused to honor, dignity and business reputation

2. In the context of this Code, an insult is deemed to be a public expression made by means of speech, picture, voice, sign or by any other form with the intention to abuse the honor, dignity or business reputation.

In the context of this Code, a public expression in the given situation and by its content may not be deemed to be an insult if it is based on accurate facts (except of natural flaws) or is justified by an overriding public interest.

9. If no reference has been provided to the source of information (author) while insulting or defaming, or the source (author) of the information is unknown, or a person carrying out media activities does not disclose the name of the author based on his/her right of not disclosing the source of information, then the obligation to compensate is on the one who has publicly presented insult or defamation, and if it has been presented in the information disseminated by a person carrying out media activities, then that person shall be responsible for compensation.

II. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists

1.4. To rely on accurate facts and trustworthy information when making analysis and comments;

1.5. To ensure that the reports, photo, video and audio materials correspond to the reality, the headlines derive from the content of the material, citations are not used outside of context, and correspondence of the personal data of ordinary citizens with public figures is not abused.

C. EXPERT OPINION

Media Ethics Observatory

having discussed

the appeal by the RA National Assembly Deputy Nazeli Baghdasaryan on the piece “A Thousand Victims More, A Thousand Victims Less” published on Hraparak.am March 12, 2021,

taking note of the fact

that there are no quotation marks in the headline of the piece, which makes it clear that the thought contained in the headline is not attributed to the MP as a direct quote from her statement or the interview she gave to the media,

admitting that

the media can make its own analyses and conclusions on the basis of public statements of public figures and state officials, as well as apply a journalistic trick by using public statements and the information obtained directly through interviews for the idea they had in advance,

as well as the fact that the media has raised probably one of the most pressing public issues, regarding which there is discontent over the steps taken by the government and the ruling party, and even the different numbers they announce give grounds to make exaggerated conclusions, putting such headlines in publications related to the issue,

considering that

in the absence the author's signature, the editorial staff is responsible for the piece,

states:

1. In the March 12, 2021 piece “A Thousand Victims More, A Thousand Victims Less” Hraparak.am deliberately used the combination of the headline and the MP's photo not only to make the publication more attractive and provocative, but also without any grounds to attribute its conclusion to a specific representative of authority or to associate with the latter, thus manipulating the trick of using the headline without quotation marks but with a photo combination and thereby caused personal insult to Nazeli Baghdasaryan.

2. The author of the piece (in this case the editorial staff of Hraparak.am) does not mention whether during the interview, he/she, using the opportunity of direct contact, had asked Nazeli Baghdasaryan what the authorities and the Deputy personally were doing in connection with the issue being covered. The editorial staff obviously ignored the fact that the deputy had personally made several public statements and presented a [report](#) about her activities on the issue of the Armenian captives, and similar news had also been [published](#) in the [media](#) and on the [NA website](#). Instead, the piece contains the following text: "While the pro-government deputies are busy looking for those responsible for their bad work, because of whom the return of the captives is not possible, through the efforts of the representatives of the very opposition,

prisoners of war are being returned to Armenia." Thus, the journalistic trick was not used in public interest, that is for obtaining and imparting reliable information and making comments based on it.

SINCE Hraparak.am is not a member of the self-regulation initiative and is not obliged to publish the current expert opinion, Media Ethics Observatory urges the author of the complaint to exercise her right to publish a response under the RA Law "On Mass Communication", and given the above-mentioned proposal of the Editor of the website to appeal to the editorial office. MEO calls on the media to publish it.

***Adopted at the MEO session of March 31, 2021
In the following composition:***

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Media Ethics Observatory was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 62 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted at the self-regulation body's meeting on March 10, 2007, and revised on May 16, 2015